

SLAVES OF THE PIPE

A GLIMPSE OF ONE OF THE SECRET OPIUM DENS OF TOULON.

The Eastern Madness and Its Victims in the French Navy—Varying Effects of the First, Second and Third Pipes of the Drug.

"You are going to Toulon?" said an attaché of one of the ministries to me some months ago. "Then you will see the curvy of the French navy, the eastern madness, which our colleagues at the colonial office and at the ministry of marine are trying hard to suppress."

"The eastern madness?" I asked.

"What is that?"

"Opium smoking," said my friend ironically. "Ask some of the Toulon newspaper men to take you round."

It was one of the first things I asked about when I got down to Toulon, and the following is an account of what I saw:

We were in a cafe near the harbor. A tall and very handsome woman sat at the table opposite to us and nodded lazily to my companion. This did not surprise me at all, because all Toulon, from the prefect maritime to the scavengers in the streets, knew him and called him by his name. There was a lazy weariness or, if you like, a weary lassitude in the woman's eyes which was curiously noticeable.

"Are you going to smoke a pipe?" she said.

He looked at me inquiringly.

"Oh, bring your friend with you. He doesn't belong to the government, does he?"

And so we all three got up and went out. I do not know exactly where we went, for the back streets of Toulon are a very Alsatia for intricacy. We unlocked a door with a key which Madame carried in her pocket. We climbed three flights of dark stairs and knocked at another door.

It was opened at last, after about a quarter of an hour, by a young woman in a kimono and curl papers. She looked at each of us with a cold stare and did not trouble to invite us in. She merely left the door open, lounged on in front, and we followed.

Imagine a room in which all you can see at first is the dirty yellow of some cocoanut matting on the floor, a few cushions covered in bright colors and several pairs of feet. It is a little puzzling at first, but you realize after a moment that the only lamp is on the floor and that it has a heavy shade, so that the light does not light up the room.

I became used to the semidarkness soon and saw that I was in a small square room, in which there were six or eight people, three women, including our companion, and several men. I noticed that the trousers which the men wore were those of navy officers. I looked at my friend, the journalist, inquiringly.

"Oh, yes," he said, "and they don't care. Once an opium smoker always an opium smoker."

We had spoken in a whisper, but one of the men, a good looking fellow, who must have been a smart officer not long before, raised himself on one elbow and glowered at us. "Curse you!" he said. "Be quiet. Curse you!" And he dropped back on to the mat again.

"The second sleep after the first pipe," said my friend.

"How do you know?"

"Because they are always irritable then," he said. "After the second pipe it takes a good deal to disturb them, and after the third, unless they are very seasoned smokers, you could let off crackers next to them before they awake of themselves, and they would think that it was wind flapping the sails."

Another of the men sat up. I must explain that there was no furniture whatever in the room. There was a cocoanut matting on the floor, there were a few pillows, and that was all. But the lighted lamp was in the corner, and in the middle, among the feet, was a thing which looked a little like a Turkish hubble-bubble pipe, a lamp of glass, in which I think spirit was burned, making a small flame.

Next to it, a little white pot with a dark brown paste in it that looked like varnish, and one small rack, like a pen rack, several knitting needles. When the man sat up the woman in the kimono and curl papers crawled over to him, took one of the knitting needles, put her finger and thumb into the gauge and cooked a ball of it on the point of a knitting needle over the flame of the lamp.

And I noticed then, as the smell became more acute, that the whole room had a treacherous sickliness about it. That, of course, was the opium. Next to the man, where I suppose he had dropped it, was a long cherry wood stem with a bulb of amber at one end and a tiny cup at the other. I think the cup had a pin in it, but I am not sure. The woman put the little ball of opium, which had frizzled and sizzled in the flame, into the cup and held the amber bulb to the man's mouth.

He drew at the pipe, inhaling the smoke, but he was too far gone to hold the pipe for himself. The woman had to do that for him. He stopped inhaling after a moment or two, and she tore the neck of his shirt open.

"Narrow squeak that," said my friend. "I know that chap. He smokes eighteen or twenty pipes sometimes, and then anything might happen to him. He would rather die of suffocation than take the trouble to undo a button."

"But what is the insidious charm of opium?" I asked.

"That I can't tell you," said my friend, "because a first pipe or two won't teach it to you, and unless you are a fool, you will never smoke a third."

The woman who had brought us in

and in whose room we were had just prepared a pipe for herself. "Smoke!" she said, and put her pipe to my lips. I took two or three whiffs and then got out of the room and the house as quickly as possible.

I learned from my friend, who came after me, that all the men in the room were navy officers. I learned, too, the next day, when I felt better, that opium, which in spite of the efforts made by the government to check consumption in the drug, is on nearly sold in all the ports and particularly on those of the south, is making terrible ravages among the officers of the French navy.

Your opium smoker is a dangerous man on board a ship, for he is like a sleepwalker. He acts unconsciously, but with apparent consciousness, and even under the influence of the drug anything might happen either to him or to the ship under his charge without his being aware of it. The minister of marine is doing his utmost to suppress the curse, and all thinking France hopes that he may succeed.—New Orleans Times-Democrat.

WAYS OF THE SPANIARDS.

Oriental Habit of Secluding Their Women Still Prevalent.

Oriental usage with regard to women still prevails in Spain, where there are no suffragists and no problems of sex. Even in society in Madrid men do not pay afternoon calls on married women, the chief form of entertainment being the evening party, or tertulia. The jealousy of Spaniards of both sexes is notorious. The eastern habit of secluding their women is still prevalent among most Spaniards; hence the illiteracy of the women, the tiresome formality of Spanish functions, the conventionality of society manners. Occasionally an American lady in the diplomatic "set" tears down the barriers of convention and accords "society" by her western ways, but Spanish women regard the innovation as we would the capers of a circus horse in the Rotten row, and you may live years in Spain on the best terms with a Spaniard before he invites you to meet his wife. You may catch more butterflies in an afternoon than obtain even a sight of the faces of the women whose husbands you meet daily in the course of a whole year's acquaintance.

But in dancing the Spanish woman is queen of her sex. To see the real thing you must get hold of a gypsy band or visit some humble dancing place in Seville or in the south. There is no dancing in the world so poetic, passionate, suggestive or graceful. Spain is the true home of the dance. There are the jota of Aragon, with its fine abandon, yet stately time; the tango, resembling the danse du ventre of Moorish Spain—the dance of gesture and suggestion; the graceful cachucha, with its chronometric play of head and arms; the jaleo de Jerez, which gyrates dance in whirling fantastic measure; the quaint dances of the Basque provinces and scores of minor local dances more or less alike peculiar to different localities. But the great dances are the bolero, the seguidilla, the chachona and the fandango of the south. These dances are the soul and epitome of Spain. In all of them prose gesture, the mystery of true dancing, plays an important part. In all of them the poetry of love and motion is exhibited with extraordinary subtlety and expression.—Austin Harrison in Nineteenth Century.

Weight Before and After Meals.

Why is it that a man does not weigh a pound more after eating a pound of food than he did before? A little reflection will readily explain this apparent mystery. During the process of mastication, deglutition, etc., certain muscles are brought into active play. Now, it is a well established fact in physiology that the exercise of any muscle or set of muscles necessitates a temporary waste of tissue and that a certain amount of carbon is eliminated and passed off during the course of a meal. This loss, however, is trifling as compared with that of respiration and perspiration, both of which functions are increased during the operation of making a meal. The length of time one may take to consume a pound of food makes but little difference in the losses. If it be eaten leisurely, there is but slight increase of respiration or perspiration, whereas if it be hurried through both are abnormally accelerated; hence by the time the meal is finished the consumer has lost appreciably in both moisture and carbonic acid. The above explains in a rough but clear manner why it is that a man may eat a pound of food and yet not weigh but from one-third to five-eighths of a pound more than he did before the meal.

Modern Fire Worship in Scotland.

Burghhead, in Morayshire, is unique in one respect. It has "the burning of the clavis." This ceremony is gone through every New Year's eve, old style. It is supposed to be a relic of fire worship. There is now only one other community, it is said, in Britain where the practice is carried on. The clavis consists of half an archangel barbed fixed on the top of a fir prop about four feet long. The second half of the barbed is broken up, put inside and mixed with tar. A stone must be used to knock in the nail which connects the pole and the barrel. The broken bits in the barrel are then lighted by means of burning peat, no such thing as a lucifer match being allowed.

In the dark winter night the blazing thing is borne up one street and down another at high speed, then carried to the Doorie hill in the middle of the village. Here the pole is fixed on a short, strong column, and the clavis burns out. The women rush in and, picking bits of the now dying clavis to "keep the witches away," disappear into the darkness.—Glasgow Herald.

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Dated June 11, 1906. JOHN C. KEYS.
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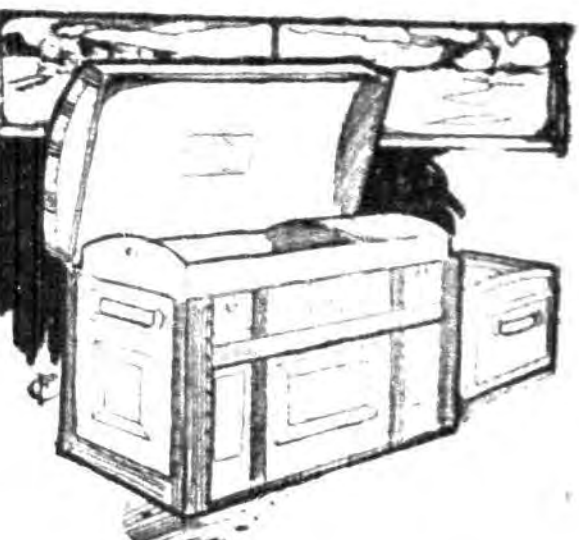
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